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RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 5618
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2006

In Today's Papers

Ankara Critical of EU Freeze on Turkey Talks, Will Move Forward
All papers report Prime Minister Erdogan said the EU decision to partially freeze entry talks with Turkey was "unfair to Turkey," underlining that Turkey had signed the customs union protocol because there were prospects for ending the isolation of Turkish Cyprus. Erdogan told AKP members on Tuesday, "We want the EU members to acknowledge the fact that the Greek Cypriots and Greece do not want a settlement on the basis of political equality with the Turkish Cypriots. I hope our friends in the EU will understand that they have to urge the Greek Cypriot administration for a solution." The PM added, "Our reform process will continue with the same decisiveness." Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul said the decision adopted by EU foreign ministers' Monday meeting indicated "a lack of vision," adding Turkey will move forward with reforms.

Cumhuriyet and Sabah say the European Commission will monitor Ankara's progress with regard to opening ports to Cyprus in 2007, 2008 and 2009. If Ankara still denies Greek Cypriots access to Turkish ports by 2009, the negotiations will be fully suspended, claims Cumhuriyet, whereas Zaman says the EU might resort to stronger sanctions if the sides fail to move forward on the issue by 2009. Cumhuriyet comments the EU foreign ministers' decision has put the chances for a settlement in the hand of the Greek Cypriots.

Cumhuriyet also says in a news commentary that "Ankara seems to have accepted the decision," and is not planning to retaliate. Evaluations in Ankara with respect to the outcome of the EU foreign ministers' meeting were that the "EU decision, which was expected to be negative, came out as least damaging for Turkey," says Cumhuriyet.

Sezer Calls for Early Elections

President Ahmet Necdet Sezer said during a meeting Tuesday with extreme nationalist party MHP that Turkey should go to early general elections in April. Sezer, whose term in office will end in May,

said early polls would relieve a "deteriorating Turkey." The President added the Turkish election system did not ensure a fair representation of voters in the parliament, stressing that the election threshold should be lowered to seven or eight percent from the current 10 percent.

Editorial Commentary on Iraq and the ISG Report

Zafer Atay writes in the economic-political daily Dunya: "It is obvious that the Bush administration's Iraq policy has totally collapsed. The policy was basically based on two lies: Saddam's weapons of mass destruction and his collaboration with terrorists. Iraq's bloody leader Saddam is gone but Iraq has been dragged into a civil war instead of democracy and stability. The ISG report listed all the Iraq realities which George Bush has declined to accept. With the impact of this report, President Bush has started talking about a strategy change, which is a first on the issue. President Bush also posed a serious blow to neo-cons by acknowledging the importance of the report and by taking into account the advice within. It is likely that Bush will make some other changes in the administration, even after Rumsfeld and Bolton, hoping to save the Republican image and prestige, which is doing very poorly nowadays."

Writing in the Mete leftist Birgun, Cubukcu comments: "The ISG report is clearly an indication of the US coming to the end of the road in Iraq, providing a last glimmer of hope for stabilizing the region and Iraq, albeit with a considerable loss. Yet the report fails to make clear whether the US is looking for stability for itself or for the region. The report does not come up with a plan B for Iraq either. We simply don't know what should or could be done if the listed 79 suggestions don't work. In sum, this is a belated report even though it contains some new and bold suggestions. The

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US is doomed to be a loser unless it changes its unilateral approach and favors diplomacy over war. There is an obvious way of settlement for Iraq -- an immediate end to the occupation and a conference to gather all elements of Iraq including the insurgents. The Iraq issue also requires a broader geographic approach that would include Turkey, Palestine, Iran and Syria."

Iraqi Kurds Object to 'Kirkuk Conference' in Ankara

Cumhuriyet report that the Iraqi Kurdish groups, upset about not being invited to a conference on Kirkuk to be held in Ankara, threatened to hold a conference in northern Iraq on Kurdish, Arab and Armenian minorities' rights in Turkey. The "Kirkuk Conference" to be held December 15 by the Turkish Global Strategy Institute think-tank had invited all the groups in Iraq except the Kurds. Despite calls from the Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) for a cancellation, the Global Strategy Institute said it will convene the conference. The Iraqi Kurds said such a conference would mean a violation in Iraq's internal affairs, says Cumhuriyet.

Parliament Speaker Arinc Praises Buyukanit's Loyalty to Ataturk

All papers: Speaking at a meeting of the Foundation for helping the poor (YOYAV), Arinc responded to the questions of journalists about his visit to Chief of General Staff Gen. Yasar Buyukanit. Arinc said that this was a courtesy visit to wish Buyukanit a successful term in office. Responding to a question about a letter allegedly sent to Buyukanit by 20 retired military officers urging him to weigh in on the presidential election process, Arinc said that Buyukanit denied receiving such a letter at the very beginning of their conversation. Arinc quoted Buyukanit saying as "We took a solemn oath to protect the democracy and the Constitution. Our understanding of democracy and culture wouldn't allow such a thing. We haven't received such a letter. But, if such a letter appears, we'll deal with it." Arinc praised the Chief of General Staff and the Armed Forces for their staunch loyalty to the principles of Ataturk and the republic.

Decision on Attack Helicopter Bid Delayed; Purchase of F-16s

Sabah, Vatan, Hurriyet, Yeni Safak and others: The final decision regarding purchase of attack helicopters has been postponed by the Defense Industry Executive Committee after the Turkish General Staff proposed that the helicopters be tested in Turkey's climate conditions. Yeni Safak reports that the committee approved the

purchase of 30 F-16s and agreed on participation in the project of Joint Strike Fighter helicopters.

PM Erdogan to Meet Clinton in New York

Cumhuriyet and Zaman: PM Erdogan will travel to the US on December 18-19 for an Alliance of Civilizations meeting. PM Erdogan, reportedly, will meet with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and with former US President Bill Clinton.

TV Highlights

NTV (7 A.M.)

Domestic News

- The Turkish Parliament will begin debating the budget bill for 2007 on December 15.

- Turkey's TESEV foundation for economic and social research said in its report "Looking for Kant in EU's Relations with Turkey" that EU criteria for Turkey's membership were not objective.

- The ruling AKP government has nominated Hilmi Bengi, director of the semi-official Anatolian News Agency, to head the state-owned broadcaster TRT. A decree has been sent to President Sezer for approval.

- Iran has reduced natural gas supply for Turkey by more than 80

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percent over the past 10 days over price disagreements.

International News

- The UN commission probing the assassination of Rafik Hariri has found "significant links" between the killing of the former Lebanese prime minister and 14 other political assassinations in Lebanon.

- About 1,500 people marched through Kirkuk yesterday to protest the Iraq Study Group recommending putting off a 2007 referendum on the future of this oil-rich city.

- The White House said President Bush will lay out his new Iraq plan to the nation early next year.

- Iranian President Ahmedinejad said Israel would one day be "wiped out" as the Soviet Union had been.

- A suicide car bomb attack on a crowd of day laborers in central Baghdad killed 70 and wounded over 200.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

WILSON